

Issue Paper

Inclusive Communities Around the World

In the city of Arnhem, Netherlands, they called it “Over the Threshold,” a Social Spearhead Plan to tackle poverty, social isolation, unemployment, addiction, and disaffected youth in a results-oriented way.

Down under in New Zealand, the UPLIFT partnership (Unlimited Potential Learning Foundation) between government, industry, and community organizations seeks to serve disadvantaged communities and reduce the digital divide by helping to train people in computer and information technology skills.

Regardless of the name, these programs are all strategies for building inclusive communities. To be inclusive, a community takes active measures to reduce inequality and to bring opportunity to underserved populations. An inclusive community works together to break down barriers separating different population groups, commits to fairness in housing, jobs and public safety, and demonstrates an appreciation for community diversity through employment and contracting practices.

American cities, state municipal leagues, and the National League of Cities are embracing the concept of inclusiveness and creating programs to advance this goal. The purpose of this paper is to highlight some successful efforts to build inclusive communities in other parts of the world in order to discern innovations or practical ideas that can be applied by American local government leaders in their hometowns.

Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland: Empowerment

Starting with a generalized municipal plan, Dumfries and Galloway explored the meaning and value of inclusiveness in their community. The result was that the theme of inclusiveness now runs through the municipal plan and a multi-agency working group, called the Inclusive Communities Forum, has institutional responsibility for taking forward the development of this initiative.

The long-range vision for Inclusive Communities in Dumfries and Galloway is to:

- enable people to have the means and motivation to make greater contributions to the social, economic, environmental and cultural life of Dumfries and Galloway;
- improve individuals’ opportunities to access services, facilities, and employment; and
- maximize the opportunity for active citizenship.

Within Dumfries and Galloway, the Director of Education and Community Services is responsible for implementation and reporting on the inclusive communities programs. This person also chairs the multi-agency Inclusive Communities Forum. Areas for work being done under this theme include:

- Promotion of accessible transport
- Engaging with excluded individuals
- Social justice initiatives
- Promotion of diversity awareness and anti-discriminatory practices
- Poverty alleviation and income maintenance

For more detailed information on this program, visit the Dumfries and Galloway website at <http://www.dgcommunity.net/dgcommunity/services.aspx?id=151>

To view the Plan for Inclusive Communities in Dumfries and Galloway, go to <http://www.dgcommunity.net/dgcommunity/xdocuments/234.pdf.ashx>

New South Wales, Australia: Creating Stronger Communities

Community Builders New South Wales is dedicated to fostering the characteristics of stronger communities which include empowerment, inclusiveness, reconciliation, safe and healthy environments, crime prevention, economic development, and partnerships.

By providing resource information and case studies, the program demonstrates how cultural diversity, access and equity, equal opportunity, and involving minority groups are vital components for an inclusive community.

Among the resources available from Community Builders, NSW are the following:

- Checklists and guidelines to ensure equal access to the arts for people with disabilities
- Support networks for low-income retirees
- Website addresses useful for teachers presenting courses on multi-culturalism
- The Office for Women in the province of New South Wales
- Settlement Information Kits useful for new immigrants
- A resource guide of service providers for the deaf and hearing impaired
- A case study on partnerships for improved public housing

For more detailed information about Community Builders, NSW, visit www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/building_stronger

Arnhem, Netherlands: Social and Economic Participation

“Over the Threshold” was designed to facilitate social integration by tackling long-term unemployment, social isolation, and disconnected youth. In practice, Over the Threshold targets vulnerable groups and helps strengthen social structures (networks) and promotes economic participation toward the goal of increased social cohesion in the community as a whole.

Program leaders make house-to-house visits to elderly people living alone and serve as intermediaries between social service agencies and those eligible for and in need of such services.

For more detailed information visit the website for the European Urban Knowledge Network at <http://www.eukn.org/eukn/themes/index.html>

Porirua, New Zealand: Digital Divide

A collaborative effort between government, the private sector and community-based organizations is training tutors across the country in computer skills. These tutors in turn teach these skills to others in their community.

The work of the New Zealand Unlimited Potential Learning Foundation (UPLIFT) is part of a wider government strategy to bridge the digital divide and increase computer literacy among the country's disadvantaged communities. Government strategy is designed to help New Zealanders create social and economic opportunities that change people's lives and transform communities including overcoming barriers of economic disadvantage, isolation, literacy and confidence.

Microsoft Corporation provided a grant to the national government to fund the operations of UPLIFT for two years. The company also donated computer software to establish community-based technology learning centers (CTLIC's) in 125 localities. Whitireia Community Polytechnic, the academic partner delivering the course materials, seeks to meet a wide range of educational and training needs with a focus on producing work-ready graduates.

For more detailed information visit:

http://www.microsoft.com/nz/presscentre/articles/2006/feb06_upliftinitiative.msp

Mexico City, Mexico: At-Risk Youth

Mexico has approximately 25 million young people ages twelve to twenty-four, at least half of whom live in poverty or extreme poverty. Mexico City bears the brunt of this large pool of disconnected and disaffected youth, some of whom certainly are drug addicts, petty criminals, vagrants and members of violent gangs.

Beginning in 1987, after an especially difficult period of attention to youth violence and gangs, programs were undertaken to assess the situation of working-class youth and find mechanisms to curb violence and reincorporate them into a society that regarded them as adversaries.

The youth on the streets were often identified by animal nicknames. Likewise, those in government authority often spoke about these violence-prone youth as "animals." The intervention program on their behalf took on the name Circo Volador, literally Flying Circus.

One of the first successes of the program was obtaining a lease from the municipal government to occupy an abandoned cinema hall in exchange for a promise that young people would be responsible for restoring and maintaining it through their collective effort. The building became a haven for young people to express their cultural and social values.

Replicated in other parts of the city, these Circo Volador Cultural Centers afforded at-risk youth the opportunity to organize music concerts, radio programs, websites, and peer support networks.

For more detailed information, visit the United Nations HABITAT Best Practices site at <http://www.bestpractices.org/bpbriefs/index.html>

Queenscliffe, Australia: Connectedness

The Borough of Queenscliffe, Victoria, launched an inclusive community project to help people feel more connected to each other. Under a “Take the First Step” campaign, residents and neighbors are encouraged to simply talk to someone new in their community. In this way, it is hoped, people will feel more connected to each other and to the community and are thus better able to cope with life’s challenges and have a greater sense of well being.

The project’s governing board has broad representation from the community and is charged with developing ideas and approaches to create a more inclusive community within the Borough. Thus far, the project has:

- Hosted community “street stall days”
- Developed a distinctive logo for promoting inclusive communities
- Used highway billboards to promote its “Take the First Step” campaign
- Run articles in newspapers about how individuals and groups can be more welcoming
- Developed a “Street Party Challenge” emphasizing safety and personal responsibility

For more detailed information visit:

http://www.queenscliffe.vic.gov.au/Page/Page.asp?Page_Id=396&h=1&p=1

Corvera de Asturias, Spain: Racial Harmony

A highly industrialized city, Corvera de Asturias drew thousands of job-seeking immigrants to the iron, steel, and chemical companies in the area. One unintended consequence was that urban ghettos of immigrant laborers were established without access to public infrastructure. When the steel industry declined in the 1990’s unemployment grew and living conditions in these ghettos deteriorated rapidly.

Corvera Mix-Race Municipality is an initiative started in 1996 to combat racism and xenophobia among various sectors of the population. The goal is to encourage interaction

between and among the different races and increase the participation of community members in municipal affairs.

All residents were encouraged to become involved in the decision-making process over allocation of local financial resources and services. Classes were organized that served to share an exchange of knowledge of different cultures and create awareness and respect for other community members. Access to enhanced educational opportunities for all ethnic groups was given a high priority.

Following the Corveran example, 25 other municipalities in and around the region have adopted similar programs.

For more detailed information, visit the United Nations HABITAT Best Practices site at <http://www.bestpractices.org/bpbriefs/index.html>

Badia Polesine, Italy: Anti-Discrimination

Access to rental housing by foreigners and access to employment by women were the two discriminatory practices that were addressed by creation of a non-governmental monitoring commission. The commission was charged with administering a local government act against racism and sexual discrimination.

The ultimate goal of the commission is to promote principles of equality, seek to eliminate discriminatory practices, and contribute to a more equitable, productive and inclusive environment in which to work and live. The commission is charged with a public education role in the area of human rights and responsibilities. In addition, it promotes special projects, advocates legal reforms, addresses complaints, and serves as a clearinghouse for other organizations dedicated to human rights. The municipality makes contributions of money and staff.

The program of activities includes intercultural music and film festivals, guest lectures, and poster and essay contests. Schools are encouraged to develop policies against all forms of racial and gender imbalance.

For more detailed information, visit the United Nations HABITAT Best Practices site at <http://www.bestpractices.org/bpbriefs/index.html>

Amsterdam, Netherlands: Community Identity

The Urban Games Foundation (Stichting StadsSpelen) promotes social cohesion at the urban neighborhood (district) level by organizing cultural and athletic competitions that give people opportunities to meet one another and identify with their own neighborhood.

The concept of StadsSpelen involves holding preliminary rounds of five types of competitions – dance, music, cooking, knowledge and sports – in various neighborhoods.

The preliminary rounds are hosted on a single day at a highly visible location. Winners advance to a final round of city-wide competition in Amsterdam's Olympic Stadium.

Resident groups in each neighborhood are recruited to manage logistics, marketing, and communications for the preliminary rounds. The Foundation also deploys its own ambassadors to help each neighborhood organize and promote the events.

Three hundred participants and three thousand spectators showed up for the first neighborhood round in May 2006. Although there were some problems with coordination and overall management of the events, the program is on schedule toward its September 2007 final round of competition.

For more detailed information visit the website for the European Urban Knowledge Network, at <http://www.eukn.org/eukn/themes/index.html>

Inclusive Cities Canada

Formed as a partnership between five social planning organizations across Canada, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), and the Laidlaw Foundation, Inclusive Cities Canada (ICC) seeks to strengthen the capacity of cities to create and sustain "inclusiveness" and ensure that diverse voices in the community are recognized.

ICC conducts research and engages local leadership and community participation in order to shape public policy and institutional practices. The initiative is designed to create a horizontal civic alliance on social inclusion across urban communities in Canada.

In April 2003, ICC released a framework paper entitled "Building Inclusive Communities: Cross-Canada Perspectives and Strategies." In November 2005, a symposium was organized to address the questions of how local governments can enhance social inclusion and what role the federal government needs to play to support social infrastructure as an essential part of a Canadian urban strategy. A copy of the conference report is available on the ICC website, www.inclusivecities.ca.

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